



Ian Wilkinson of FarmED.



The Future of Good Food

“It’s a world-wide problem, but there are local solutions – and it’s these which hold the key.” Ian Wilkinson talks to Siân Ellis about the work FarmED are doing to give a voice to the many small farms across communities in the Cotswolds.

The worldwide problem, of course, is: how do we produce food sustainably to feed growing human populations without ruining the earth’s ecosystems and exhausting natural resources? FarmED, founded by Ian and his wife Celene at 107-acre Honeydale Farm, Shipton-under-Wychwood, is a new centre for Farming and Food Education that focuses on the crucial link between good food and good farming. It officially opens this spring but it is already abuzz with activities: an exciting place which, as General Manager Jonty Brunyee says, “dares to be different, to be enterprising and innovative.”

FarmED provides a space for everyone, from farmers and rural entrepreneurs, to scientists, politicians, students and schoolchildren to share knowledge, learn and debate “how to grow good food – good for us and good for the planet.” Visitors can explore the surrounding farm to see

on-the-ground ideas in action: crop rotations, trial plots including herbal leys, arable plots and wildlife mixtures, natural flood management, woodland and wildlife habitats, wildflower meadows, livestock, an orchard, apiary, and kitchen garden run by the Kitchen Garden People.

Diverse, regenerative farming

It is the sort of diverse, seasonal, mixed farming that Ian knew as an agricultural apprentice in the 1980s before systems became more and more intensive and specialised. With 35 years’ experience helping farmers as a seed merchant – he is MD of Cotswold Seeds at Moreton-in-Marsh – he believes we should once again be “increasing diversity in order to have self-sufficient farms which have a really healthy, functioning ecosystem.”

Jonty agrees. He grew up in a farming family and has 25 years’ experience in the sustainable farming and environmental sector (including as an award-winning organic farmer and senior academic at the Royal Agricultural University). Farming systems need to move beyond the merely sustainable to the regenerative, he says.

Ian and Celene acquired Honeydale Farm at auction in 2013, to create a working demonstration farm showcasing examples of regenerative farming – all beginning with the soil. “Healthy soil leads to healthy food, and of course healthy food leads to healthy people,” Ian says. He has changed arable cropping on the farm from monoculture (barley) to an eight-year rotation including heritage wheat, oats and barley, and at the heart of the rotation is four years of fertility-building, soil-improving, drought-resistant herbal ley.



FarmED provides a space for everyone, from farmers and rural entrepreneurs, to scientists, politicians, students and schoolchildren to share knowledge, learn and debate “how to grow good food – good for us and good for the planet.”



The artist's impression of the FarmED learning complex, opening spring 2020.

“We now have a thriving ecosystem with healthy insects, healthy farmland birds, healthy water, healthy sheep,” Ian says. Another “massive effect” of diverse farming has been: “We spent less because we became self-sufficient.” A win-win.

Accelerating change

A Cotswold LEADER grant helped towards the construction of the FarmED education centre, and other buildings include a FarmEAT food hub enabling visitors to tuck into Honeydale Farm and other local produce – completing the good farming/good food story link. There's also a lecture space and a demonstration area.

“We will have lots of dirty, smelly hands-on fun for children, farm walks, and courses,” Jonty says. “On the formal side I'm really interested in organising a FarmED study programme open particularly to people who want to get into food and farming, perhaps studying part-time. People can also hire a room for activities and we can show them around the farm and feed them.”



Farm visit highlights include learning about trial plots, currently comparing different types of herbal leys by looking at carbon capture, forage production, and species content. Or tour the traditional orchard, planted four years ago and containing 150 different, mainly Oxfordshire varieties of apples, pears, plums, and cherries, which will be processed on-farm to make food and drinks. Ian and Jonty are keen to promote local rural employment based around plant growing and processing, and there is already a kitchen garden micro-business on the farm.



Jonty Brunyee, General Manager.

Ian says he has never been more optimistic about the groundswell of feeling, from farmers to consumers, that we need change, and at FarmED “We want to support these people and accelerate that change, creating this space where people can be innovative.” You will certainly be inspired by FarmED's dynamic case for rich, diverse, regenerative farming, sustainable food production, and systems that celebrate small farmers, local supply chains and rural enterprise.

If you'd like to hear about FarmED's official launch, or visit for a farm walk, study tour, or conference, get in touch at farm-ed.co.uk or follow @RealFarmED